

Interview Summary

Interview: AST3 Aaron C. Bean
Location: Air Station Kodiak
Present: Commander Karl Baldessari

Summary of Interview with AST3 Aaron C. Bean

AST3 Bean is a fully qualified rescue swimmer with three years total active duty service in the Coast Guard. He has been an AST for one year and has been assigned to Air Station Kodiak for approximately seven months. He has not had the opportunity to attend Advanced Rescue Swimmer School as of the day of this interview.

As a member of the CGNR 6020 deployed crew on 08 December 2004, AST3 Bean found himself preparing CGNR 6020 to respond to the drifting SELENDANG AYU. He said during breakfast he learned that he and his crew would be delivering 26 survival suits to the SELENDANG AYU crew. The crew experienced a relatively uneventful take off from Dutch Harbor in low visibility, high winds and snow squalls. He recalled hearing that the Coast Guard Cutter ALEX HALEY (ALEX HALEY) had attempted to take the SELENDANG AYU in tow without success. AST3 Bean understood at some point after arriving on scene that the mission had changed from survival suit delivery to crew evacuation. Delivery of survival suits was never discussed again. AST3 Bean participated in the pre-hoist briefing including discussion concerning rescue swimmer use. The CGNR 6020 crew elected to use a direct hoist procedure without rescue swimmer due to the size of the vessel, ample hoisting references and ambulatory state of the evacuees.

AST3 Bean confirmed that after some initial delays on the deck of SELENDANG AYU CGNR 6020 hoisted nine crew members and delivered them to ALEX HALEY. During the delivery to ALEX HALEY AST3 Bean explained that CGNR 6021 was hoisting an additional nine crewmembers that were ultimately transferred to CGNR 6020 on the beach as a result of difficult hoisting conditions on ALEX HALEY. CGNR 6020 recovered to Dutch Harbor with evacuees and prepared to suspend operations for the night. According to AST3 Bean CHNR 6020 was requested to return to scene before they departed the Dutch Harbor airport. The crew recognized that there was maintenance due on the aircraft but felt it was safe to complete the mission and address the maintenance at a later time. The CGNR 6020 crew departed Dutch Harbor in low visibility, high winds and snow to return to the SELENDANG AYU.

AST3 Bean recalled there were a total of eight crew left on the SELENDANG AYU and although CGNR 6513 was now airborne CGNR 6020 would conduct the evacuation because of the greater space capacity. He said CGNR 6020 assumed a hoisting position similar to earlier that day, off the port bow. AT3 Bean remarked that SELENDANG AYU crew members were not making any attempt to get into the rescue basket once it was placed on deck despite prompting from CGNR 6020 Flight Mechanic/hoist operator. The inactivity resulted in the recovery of the basket and the deployment of the AST3 Bean to expedite the evacuation. AST3 Bean was delivered to the SELENDANG AYU

via the basket, outfitted in aircrew dry suit, flight boots, gloves and flight helmet. He described the conditions on aboard SELENDANG AYU as dangerous with waves washing over the decks. AST3 Bean was able to quickly organize the hoisting evolutions and had three crew members aboard CGNR 6020 before being washed across the deck by a wave. During the fourth hoist AST3 Bean remembered being shocked by the basket but kept the evacuees moving. He recalled the seventh hoist being completed as he turned to bring the last evacuee (SELENDANG AYU master) to the hoist area. At this moment AST3 Bean said he heard the sound of engines winding down and saw CGNR 6020 out of the corner of his eye, moving in a forward and down direction, descending below the rail of the SELENDANG AYU. A moment later he heard and saw the main rotor of CGNR 6020 hit the rail and the side of the ship.

Realizing CGNR 6020 was in the water AST3 Bean said he turned his attention to the development of a survival plan for the master and himself. AST3 Bean reported hearing alarms, which according to the master indicated flooding. He said he asked the master where the safest place aboard the vessel could be located but discounted the master's suggestion of the super structure due to the necessity of traversing through significant wave action over the decks. AST3 Bean recovered a radio from the master and established communication with ALEX HALEY. He continued to query the master about safety and survival issue leading to the identification and hand securing of a life raft. AST3 Bean described the effort he made to retain control of the packed life raft as waves continued to wash over the deck. According to AST3 Bean it was at this approximate time that above the sounds of alarms and venting he heard a loud 'boom'. He said he asked the master if he knew what caused the sound and that the master responded: the ship is breaking up. AST3 Bean remembered a short period of time passed while he was speaking with the master and when he looked aft toward the SELENDANG AYU super structure it was shearing off (approximately 30-35 degrees off center line). Although AST3 Bean made no mention of time he felt that it was a matter of minutes before the SELENDANG AYU broke completely in half at about the 4th hold. He reported that the vessel bow section lost all power and was still floating, but he had lost the life raft. AST3 Bean maintained constant communications with ALEX HALEY throughout the breakup of the vessel.

AST3 Bean and the SELENDANG AYU master sought shelter and waited for the return of CGNR 6513. AST3 Bean witnessed CGNR 6513 having difficulty delivering the rescue basket to the port bow deck of the SELENDANG AYU at which time he and the master moved to the starboard bow. Once he realized CGNR 6513 was continuing to experience trouble hoisting AST3 Bean moved further aft on the starboard side, in the vicinity of the fourth hold. According to AST3 Bean it was from this position that CGNR 6513 was ultimately successful in recovering him and the SELENDANG AYU master. AST3 Bean recalled searching for additional survivors after the recovery was complete. He specifically remembered conducting two shoreline sweeps believing any survivors would have been washed towards shore by this time. At the completion of the search CGNR 6513 departed the scene for Dutch Harbor where they ceased operations for the night.